

WASHINGTON, D.C. --- Today, Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), along with over 159 of his Republican and Democratic colleagues, sent a letter to the House Appropriations Committee in support of increased funding for Amtrak. The letter, organized by Rep. Blumenauer, requests \$1.975 billion for Amtrak for the fiscal year 2003 to avoid elimination of services throughout the Amtrak system.

President Bush included only \$521 million for Amtrak in his fiscal year 2003 budget, which is the same level of funding as last year, but significantly below Amtrak's \$955 million authorization for fiscal year 2002. Amtrak has testified that without an appropriation of \$1.2 billion, it will need to cut service. An increase in funding will help Amtrak make badly needed infrastructure improvements and cover operating expenses for long-distance service.

"The future of our national passenger rail system is at a critical point in its history. I am pleased with this showing of support for Amtrak and for keeping our national passenger train network moving," said Rep. Blumenauer. "I look forward to working with my colleagues to make a significant and long-overdue funding commitment to Amtrak."

The President and CEO of Amtrak, David Gunn, remarked, "Amtrak is grateful for this strong show of support from Congress. This letter, signed by over 35% of the House, is an important recognition of the service Amtrak provides to hundreds of American communities."

"Our colleagues' response to this letter is outstanding and bodes well for the future passage of this bill," said Rep. Quinn, Chairman of the House Railroads Subcommittee. "Amtrak is critical to our nation's transportation infrastructure and I cannot envision America without it. HR 4545 funds Amtrak at a sufficient level to preserve jobs and routes, while at the same time providing some accountability provisions. It gives the passenger rail service a 'band-aid' for next year while the Congress and the Administration have a serious discussion about Amtrak's future in America."

In 1997, Congress reauthorized Amtrak for 5 years at a total of \$5.2 billion, while the actual amount appropriated was only \$2.7 billion. Over time, this under-funding has led to a backlog of badly needed infrastructure projects and critical life-safety needs. Last month in its annual report on the financial condition of Amtrak, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Inspector General assessed Amtrak's infrastructure needs at \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion annually over the next 20 years.

Recently the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure Railroad Subcommittee overwhelmingly approved a one-year, \$1.975 billion, authorization for Amtrak. The legislation, H.R. 4545, authorizes for fiscal year 2003 \$1.2 billion in federal funding for capital and operating expenditures, as well as \$375 million for rail security projects across the system and \$400 million for life-safety improvements in Amtrak tunnels along the northeast corridor. Additionally, the bill contains several provisions that enhance the oversight role of Congress and the Administration over Amtrak's financial and operating status. The full committee is expected to mark up the bill soon.